

# Butterflies: the Pretty Pollinators

Head and shoulders  
Photo of DC or  
Soil Conservationist  
here

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You'd have to look hard to find a down side to butterflies.

Few cause damage to crops or humans, for instance.

On the other hand, on the positive side, they are 1) important pollinators 2) good indicators of the ecological quality of a habitat, as important components of the food chain 3) colorful, aesthetically pleasing, fun to watch and 4) a backyard, park or schoolyard favorite of children and adults alike.

The role of pollination of U.S. crops is not small potatoes. From almonds to alfalfa to apples, pollinators are key to production of 150 food crops worth \$10 billion each year.

The honey bee is the most valuable pollinator, only 15% of the crops are pollinated by domestic bees; 80% are pollinated by wild bees and other wildlife, including butterflies.

More broadly, about 218,000 of the world's 250,000 flowering plants, including 80% of the world's species of food plants, rely on pollinators to reproduce.

## Butterfly habitat destruction.

The main threat to butterflies is the destruction and loss of their habitats. The channelization of riparian areas, draining of wetlands, lowering of water tables, growth of cities, and intensification of agriculture all contribute to this habitat loss.



The Monarch is one of more than 700 butterfly species in the United States. Land use changes and development have resulted in significant loss of their habitat.

Widespread use of pesticides may also threaten healthy butterfly populations.

## Monarch nectar corridors.

Scientists are particularly concerned about habitat loss in "nectar corridors" -- the migratory routes that pollinators follow in order to take advantage of a sequence of plants coming into bloom along a south-to-north gradient in the spring and the reverse in the fall. The habitat is critical to migrating Monarch butterflies, as well as hummingbirds, bats, and other nectar-dependent migratory animals.

## Butterfly habitat.

Adult butterflies rely on nectar, while developing caterpillars need leaves and foliage. Both get their water from the plants. A variety of native wildflowers, trees, shrubs and grasses interspersed across the landscape offers good butterfly habitat. Consider planting wildflower gardens, roadsides and idle areas with native nectar-producing plants, legumes and grasses.

For more information, stop at our office at \_\_\_\_\_ (Number) \_\_\_\_\_ (Street) \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ (city) \_\_\_\_\_, or visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute's website at [www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov) or the NRCS home web site at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

## Wildlife Ways Did you know....



The Monarch butterfly journeys more than 2,000 miles to winter in warmer climates. This long migration makes the Monarch somewhat different from most butterflies, which hibernate.